

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF E-LEARNING IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN GOVERNMENT HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the writer aims to explore the possibility of implementing of E- learning in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Government Higher secondary schools in Kerala. Besides, the paper also examines various learning theories supported by E- learning. This paper analyses the pedagogical implications related to implementing E- learning in Kerala after a careful needs analysis of the current socio economic and educational scenario in the state. The literature review conducted by the researcher clearly shows that no systematic work has been conducted till date to study the impact of E- learning in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Government aided Higher Secondary schools in the state. With this end in view, a detailed questionnaire was administered to 200 English language teachers in Government Higher Secondary schools in Kerala to analyze the relevance of E- learning and to ascertain the practical issues in implementing E- learning in Higher Secondary schools in Kerala. The results of the current survey verify that integrating E- learning in language classrooms in Kerala has clearly become the need of the hour. An overwhelming majority of the respondents agree that E- learning is beneficial for improving English language learning, especially in rural areas and will contribute to developing autonomous learning among students. The survey shows engagement, attendance and the motivation of the language learners will improve through E- learning which will reflect in better performance of the wards in standardized tests.

KEYWORDS: *Language, English Language Teaching, Technology, Second Language Learning & Computer in EFL Classroom*

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INTRODUCTION

The millennial language learners in this hi-tech era are perhaps the first generation of learners who are nurtured entirely in the aftermath of technological revolution. Gone are the days where the learners poured over books for days in a library to gather information. Now, the knowledge is readily available for the learners at their fingertips with the click of a mouse. Thanks to techno savvy students of today who interact with the world on a daily base using internet and myriad of social networking websites, chats, podcats, blogs, vlogs, language learning and teaching has acquired a new outlook. This favourable external environment for teaching English must be utilized to the maximum in our country so as to improve the efficiency of language learning, reevaluate the pedagogical strategies for language teaching and to reexamine the changed role of teacher and learner. E-learning (EL) has been widely accepted as the golden key which will give language teaching and learning a

multifaceted outlook and provide autonomous learning opportunities for the language learners of twenty first century. The aim of this study is to explore the possibilities of integrating E-Learning (EL) in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Government Higher Secondary Schools In Kerala.

E-LEARNING – AN OVERVIEW

E-learning (EL) which started as an offshoot of internet and computer assisted language learning (CALL), took its time to be recognized as a valid and effective pedagogical device. **Also, known as computerized electronic learning, online learning, internet learning, EL can be defined as a pedagogical technique aimed at utilizing electronic technologies to access the educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom.** According to Blake, one of the reasons why formal L2 teaching is often unsuccessful is that students encounter either too little of the target language or that the input they do receive is of poor quality. By using a computer, however, the students can access the web to find websites or videos of the target language and thus increase their exposure to authentic target language Blake (2013: 2-3). European commission (2001) defined EL as the medium of instruction and interaction using materials synchronously or asynchronously, so as to promote collaborative or individual teaching in the classroom. Levy (2009: 770-771) promotes the view that that using CALL for practicing grammar will be as effective as a traditional instructor led grammar classroom, as the program can actively emulate the benefits of a traditional classroom and provide instantaneous feedback to the learner (Levy 2009: 770-771).

Five types of EL can be categorized as follows a) *telementored EL* - where the printed materials are transferred electronically to the learners b) *learner ledEL* – where the learner work on the learning materials at their own time to promote autonomous learning. c) *facilitated EL* - when the learning happens through online forums and groups related to the topic of the course under the mediation of the course instructor d) *instructor ledEL* -where the instructor led video, podcasts, webcasts, are either streamed online or downloaded from the computer or a hard disk. e) *embedded EL* - provide the learners with relevant audio and video sources in the form of weblinks which can either be sreamed online directly or downloaded at learners' own convenience.(Gulbahar, 2009; Horton & Horton 2003) Today, thanks to rapid advances in technology, EL assume many multifaceted avatars including virtual classrooms, cloud based E- learning, Moodle, blackboard, digital collaboration etc.

Advantages of EL

- **Variety of Teaching Resources to Match Varying Student Aptitudes**

The search engines like Google, Chrome, Firefox, Safari not only provides a wealth of information at the click of a button at no cost. The information thus obtained can easily be turned into multimedia courseware, thereby providing rich and contextualized authentic materials for language learning.

- **Direct Access to Information**

EL empowers the students to learn the language anywhere at any time. The study materials can be directly obtained or downloaded online. Social networking groups, blogs and vlogs provide avenues for lively debates and discussions. Smart phones and various language learning apps have opened up new avenues for language learning which can be customized according to the needs and individual learning styles of the learners.

- **More Effective Learning**

All language learners want relevant, personalized and self-paced content for language learning. However, face to face courses in the classrooms may not always deliver the results students are seeking for. EL ensures that this gap is filled, that the information that learners receive is in sync with what they want and when they want. Digital self paced learning can be accessed at a learners' point of need and they can apply what they have learned right away.

- **Flexible Timing to Suit the Learner Needs and Their Aptitudes**

Since EL content can be accessed from anywhere at anytime, EL suits the needs of all types of learners, young and old alike. The engagement, attendance and motivation of the learners are expected to improve when compared to the learners in a traditional classroom.

- **High Learning Retention**

The better and more receptive attitude students exhibit towards EL is expected to improve learners' performance on standardized tests, and other similar forms of evaluations.

- **Time and Money Saving Device**

EL is cost effective in terms of reduction of cost of trainers, course materials, travel and accommodation, thereby reducing the overall costs of learning and development in an organization.

- **Lesser Environmental Impact**

EL provides a much needed alternative to traditional methods of printing and testing in the classrooms, thereby help to significantly reduce the carbon footprint.

Learning Theories Supported By E Learning

EL effectively supports the key tenants of adult learning theories like project based learning, action learning, experiential learning, self directed learning and transformational learning. EL is based on the cognitive science principles like *multimedia principle* (audio, visual or a combination of both enhance language learning among learners) *modality principle* (effective learning is promoted when visuals / text are accompanied by audio narration), *coherence principle* (contextualized graded learning resources enhance the overall coherence and lead to increased motivation and retention levels), *contiguity principle* (effective learning is promoted whenever relevant information is placed close to graphics, videos, pictures etc), *segmenting principle* (learning is promoted and longer retention is activated when content matter is broken down into smaller chunks) *learner control principle* (the learner can control his pace of learning), *personalization principle* (a social presence indicated by an informal / friendly tone will activate EL in beginner levels, while more advanced learners benefit from more direct tone of voice) *pre training principle* (low prior knowledge learners can benefit from introducing key terms prior to the lesson

EXPLORING EL IN KERALA – A NEED ANALYSIS

Kerala is one of the most densely populated states of India, which boasts a literacy rate comparable to the developed nations of the world. Basic schooling has been both free and mandatory ever since the first communist government made its mark in Kerala. However, the aforementioned rosy picture cannot hide the stark truth that the English-teaching situation in Kerala schools leaves a lot to desired. The saga of jam packed classrooms lacking basic

infrastructure, hassled, inexperienced and often unmotivated teachers, marks-driven students who study with the sole purpose of passing exams, insensitive and often uncaring bureaucratic rigidity, intransigent curriculum and course materials and finally an evaluation system which tests rote memorization rather than the actual mastery of the language are some of the many practical stumbling blocks obstructing Kerala's educational system. **Manjooran (1997: 4)** rightly observes, it is a misconception that ten years of text book teaching with an examination-oriented approach will yield any solid language learning.

In the light of current educational scenario and keeping abreast with the rapid technological advances in ELT, the Kerala government has launched a few EL vocational initiatives viz. Project Akshaya, with the noble intention of making at least one member in each of the 64 Lakh families e-Literate. E-learning programs like Intel learning, Arabic Tutor, Internet for Mass, Medical Transcription, e-Vidhya etc are already introduced and are implemented by a number of e-centers. However, no systematic EL programs have been implemented till date at the school level or higher secondary level to facilitate language learning among students within the academic setting of a school.

REVOLUTIONIZING ELT IN KERALA THROUGH E- LEARNING

It is high time that the out dated rote learning techniques in a teacher centered language classroom be brought up to date with the advances in EL globally to help our learners become better and more enlightened language users. The modular approach to language learning which is the corner stone of Computer-Assisted Language Learning technology (CALL) is extremely beneficial for practicing each specialized skill (L/S/R/W). This student centered approach not only fosters linguistic sensitivity, improve the language production skills but also improves the learners' receptive skills. An overview of how ELT in a traditional language classroom in Kerala can be revolutionized through EL is summarized as follows.

Listening

It's common knowledge that in a traditional language classroom in Kerala, listening skill hardly gives any importance. A few listening passages which a student come across are strictly selected by the teacher and often decontextualized with no relevance to their day to day lives. EL revolutionizes this paradigm by offering the students an opportunity to choose listening passage themselves. Research has shown that interactive listening passages can have a positive impact on students' linguistic structures, vocabulary, sound patterns and prosody (Verdugo & Belmont, 2007:89). This direct interest result in autonomous learning and greater student involvement. Multimedia and online sources like podcasts provide a goldmine of resources which traditional sources cannot cater to. In addition, EL even provide a chance for language instructors to develop their own listening comprehension passages using several free, easy to use multilingual audio editors, customized to the needs and cultural context of the learners in Kerala

Speaking

The language skill that benefits the most from computer-assisted language learning technology is speaking and there is a multitude of applications that let users record both audio and video (Morales 2014: 23-24). Students are known to exhibit lower affective filter and pliable to take more linguistic risks while practicing with a computer assisted software than in an instructor led traditional classroom setting. Multimedia learning sources with extensive texts, graphics,, animation, digitalized audio and video clips provide a rich and varied source for practicing pronunciation. We currently have technology to convert written text into speech, there by computer is no longer a passive listener but an active

participant in the conversation. Automatic Speech Recognition software (ASR) enables the learners to 'talk' with their computers, record, playback and self-evaluate their speech. In speech recognition and error detection, EL provide new dimensions previously unheard of in a traditional classroom.

Reading

Unlike traditional text books, EL provide learners a unique opportunity to read materials which suit their interests and categorized as per their proficiency level of the language. A multimedia reading sources open avenues to read about the real issues facing today's world and the Malayalee learners will have the opportunity to work at their own pace which is not afforded in a traditional language classroom.. Access to countless eBooks through online library which provide instant vocabulary help through an internal glossary, further enhances the reading skill of the learners.

Writing

Writing is an area where a student traditionally faces many difficulties due to physical, cognitive or restrictive environment of a traditional language classroom. EL provides a paradigm shift in traditional writing practices followed in the language classroom in Kerala through technical writing, pop up quiz, visual examples, video writing, audio writing, scenario writing, story telling etc. Studies have proved that students who use EL tools to produce written work in the classroom often demonstrate improved writing speed, spelling accuracy, fluency, and legibility in their writing product (Handley-More, Deitz, Billingsley, & Coggins, 2003). Practicing writing by using Word is excellent as it provides greater fluidity in writing with an inbuilt spelling and grammar check.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyze the relevance of EL and to ascertain the practical issues in implementing EL in Higher Secondary school level in Kerala, the following questionnaire was administered to 200 English language teachers in Govt. secondary schools in Kerala. Cluster sampling method was followed throughout the study. Schools which took part in the study were divided into two strata – rural and urban. The following questionnaire was mailed to the participants. Prior contact, continued follow up (weekly, three times), and provision of reward was used to increase the response rate in this study. Out of the 200 participants (English language teachers) who took part in the survey, 165 returned the questionnaire with a response rate of 82.5%. The questions were designed to ratify the feasibility and efficacy of inducting EL as a pioneering effort in the language classroom and integrating the same in the language learning curriculum. Table 1 shows the questions used for the survey. A four-point question was used to examine the participants' response. "definitely agree", "agree", "disagree", "definitely disagree" corresponded to points 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. In this part, scores greater than and equal to 3 meant the affirmative possibility of adopting web-based learning; conversely, scores less than and equal to 2 meant the negative possibility (i.e., rejection) of adopting EL

Table 1: Questionnaire for English Language Teachers

	Questions	Definitely Agree	Agree	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
1.	EL is beneficial for improving English language learning among students.				
2.	EL is beneficial for rural areas with limited access to academic facilities.				
3.	EL will reinforce classroom language teaching.				
4.	EL will promote autonomous learning and				

	make students more responsive to their learning				
5.	EL promotes task based learning and will better equip students in a competitive job environment.				
6.	EL will improve the educational standards and better help to align language classroom with the course / syllabus objectives.				
7.	EL promotes life long learning among students.				
8.	EL must be integrated within the classroom teaching hours				
9.	EL can equip you to evaluate the students in a more objective manner.				
10.	EL requires extensive faculty training for effective implementation				
11.	How many hours of teacher assisted EL will be considered ideal for language learners in secondary level	Less than 2 hrs/week	Between 2-5 hours weekly	Between 5-7 hours weekly	More than 7 hours per week
12.	How many hours of unassisted EL will be considered ideal for language learners in secondary level	Less than 1 hr/week	Between 1-2 hours weekly	Between 2-3 hours weekly	More than 3 hours per week
13.	Which language faculty deserves more focus during an EL session	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
14.	Which type of audio visual aid will be most beneficial for student	Audio clip	Video	Images	Animated graphics

What are the practical difficulties you foresee as an educator for the effective implementation of EL in a Secondary language classroom in Kerala

Suggestions and feedback

Figure 1: Descriptive Questionnaire

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A simple but comprehensive quantitative analysis involving the average mean scores of 165 participants who took part in the survey was compiled. An overwhelming 150 out of 165 (90%) respondents who took part in the survey strongly agreed that EL is beneficial in promoting English language learning students. 84% of the respondents felt that rural areas with limited access to academic facilities will benefit the most from EL program. 155 respondents (93%) who took part in the survey agreed that EL will facilitate autonomous and independent learning. However, only 75% felt that EL will better equip the learners for a competitive job market by promoting task based learning. When asked whether EL will promote the education standards and better align language classroom to meet the course objectives, almost 70% of the respondents

agreed. Only 33% felt that EL must be integrated within the classroom teaching hours. However, 90% of the participants believe that EL will help to evaluate the learners in a more objective manner. An overwhelming 98% of the participants did feel that an extensive faculty training is a must for effective implementation of the program.

The majority of the respondents (75%) voted in favour of 2-5 dedicated teacher assisted hours for EL per week. While 17% felt that 5-7 hours weekly will be sufficient, it is interesting to note that only 8% of the participants opted for less than 2 hours of weekly EL program. When quizzed about the number of unassisted EL hours, 2-3 hours of unassisted EL study was deemed appropriate by over 80% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (over 85%) voted Listening & speaking should deserve the most attention during an EL session, 10% of the respondents felt EL will improve writing and reading levels of the wards. Videos (65%) and audio clips (25%) were chosen as the most beneficial audiovisual aid to bolster learning among the students by the language teachers who took part in the survey

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

From the above study, one can safely conclude that EL is a feasible and valuable learning model which will have a positive and direct impact in English language teaching and learning among secondary schools in Kerala. The research conducted as a part of present study shows that integrating EL into the language classroom in Kerala has clearly become the need of the hour as almost 92% of the respondents who took part in the survey agreed that EL will be beneficial for improving English language learning, especially in rural areas and will contribute to developing autonomous learning among students who are digital natives in every sense. EL provides a viable tool for authentic study materials and serve as an effective learning and teaching platform for both students and teachers. Productive skills like speaking and writing can be effectively improved through E learning platform. The receptive attitude shown by both teachers and learners towards EL is here to stay. The survey shows that the engagement, attendance and the motivation of the language learners in secondary schools in Kerala is expected to improve which will reflect in better performance of the wards in standardized tests. The improved oral proficiency of the learners will be conducive in the increasing one's chances of finding productive employment in today's competitive job market. However, the study recommends needs analysis to be done at the program preparation stage to eliminate learning barriers, increase motivation and to reduce the attrition rates among the students. Further study is needed to investigate technical & infrastructure requirements for the effective implementation of the EL program in Secondary schools in Kerala.

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